FACT SHEET - Waterfowl Harvests, August 2006

- Liberal duck seasons (60 days, 5 bird bag limit) and resident goose seasons have resulted in high waterfowl harvests in Virginia during the past several years. Harvest has averaged ~150,000 ducks and ~60,000 geese from 2000 - 2005, compared to 115,000 ducks and 25,000 geese during the 1990's. The long season length and liberal bags offer greater opportunity and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season.

- Waterfowl hunter numbers in Virginia have been generally stable since 1990, and Federal Duck Stamp sales have averaged 24,045 since then. The number of duck and goose hunters in 2005-06, as measured by the HIP survey, were 18,600 and 14,500 respectively.

- Last season (2005-06), cold temperature in late November provided good duck hunting at the start of the season. However, mild winter temperatures thereafter allowed birds to disperse over a large variety of habitats and delayed migration of some species.

- The duck harvest in Virginia in 2005-06 (138,300) increased slightly from 2004-05 (136,400), but was 7.3% below the 5-year average (148,460 ducks). However, this is still higher than the average harvest taken during the 1990's (114,770 ducks).

- Mallards are the most commonly harvested duck in Virginia. The mallard harvest in Virginia in 2005-06 (53,500) increased 23.4% from 2004-05 (41,000 mallards) and was 6.9% above the 5-year average (49,950). This is also well above the average annual harvest (38,000) during the 1990's.

- The Canada goose harvest in Virginia in 2005-06 (61,400) increased 10.4% from 2004-05 (55,000) and was 6.1% above the 5-year average (57,680). This is well above the average annual harvest (38,000) during the 1990's.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks, August 2006

Mid-Continent Areas: Habitat conditions in the Prairies during the May Waterfowl Breeding Survey were slightly improved from 2005 due to good precipitation, warm spring temperatures, and carry-over effects from last year. The parkland and northern grassland regions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan received abundant rain in March and April, which created good to excellent habitat conditions. Overall, the pond count in the mid-continent region increased 13% and was 26% higher than the long-term average.

In the traditional survey area, the total breeding population (BPOP) estimate was 36.2 million ducks, which is 14% greater than last year (31.7 million) and 9% above the long-term (1955-2005) average.

- The BPOP estimate for **mallards** (7.3 million) was similar to last year and their long-term avg.
- **Blue-winged teal** numbers (5.9 million) were 28% higher than 2005 and are 30% above their long-term average. **Green-winged teal** (2.6 million) were 20% higher than 2005 and are 39% above their long term average
- **Gadwall** (2.8 million) were 30% higher than 2005 and are 67% above their long term average. **Northern shovelers** (3.7 million) were similar to 2005 and are 69% above the long term average.
- **American wigeon** (2.2 million) were similar to 2005 but are 17% below their long term average.
- **Canvasbacks** (700,000) were 33% higher than 2005 and 23% above their long term average. **Redheads** (900,000) were 55% higher than 2005 and 47% above their long term average.
- **Pintail** and **scaup** continue to be species of concern. Pintail (3.4 million) were 32% higher than 2005 but remain 18% below their long term average. Scaup (3.2 million) were 4% below 2005 and dropped to a record low for the second consecutive year, falling 37% below their long term average.

Eastern Breeding Areas: In the eastern areas of Canada and the U.S., habitat conditions were generally favorable, with warm temperature and around normal moisture conditions. Heavy rains and cool temperatures in May/June caused nest flooding and brood losses in some northern areas, while in southern areas below normal rainfall provided poor conditions for brood rearing. Overall production this year may be slightly reduced.

- Breeding population estimates for 5 of the 10 species surveyed were similar to or above last year and 6 were near their long term average. Only small changes in BPOPs from 2005 were noted for mallards (-7%), black ducks (+4%), and wood ducks.

Virginia: A mild winter and early spring provided good conditions for early nesting waterfowl. However, below average spring temperatures and some flooding may have hindered brood survival. Overall production is expected to be slightly below average.

- In Virginia, the breeding pair estimate for mallards (34,064) increased from 2005 while the wood duck estimate (19,155) declined. Estimates for local breeding black duck (1,200) decreased slightly from last year and continue to be of concern due to loss of available nesting habitat.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Migrant Canada Geese, August 2006

- Migrant Canada geese from the Atlantic Population declined significantly from the mid-1980's through the mid-1990s. The hunting season was closed in 1995 to allow the population to recover as fast as possible.

- The population rebounded quickly and a limited hunting season (6 days with a 1 bird bag) was held in both 1999 and 2000.

- As the population increased, the season was extended to 30 days in 2001, and 45 days in both 2002 and 2003. The bag limit remained at 1 per day. In 2004, the season remained at 45 days but a 2 goose daily bag was allowed for the last 20 days. In 2005, the season was 45 days with 2 geese for the entire season.

- The number of breeding pairs counted on the spring survey has increased significantly since 1995. Good production from 1997-2001spurred population recovery. This year's breeding population estimate was 160,020, a slight decrease from last year; however, the survey was a bit late and may be biased low. The population is above the threshold that would allow a 2 bird/day bag.

YEAR	NUMBER OF PAIRS	
1988	118,031	
1993	91,307	
1994	40,086	
1995	29,302	(season closed)
1996	46,058	" "
1997	63,216	" "
1998	42,166**	(incomplete survey)
1999	77,451	(season reopened)
2000	93,230	
2001	146,662	
2002	164,840	
2003	156,937	
2004	174,793	
2005	162,395	
2006	160,020	

- An early snow melt should lead to good production on the arctic breeding grounds this year. Mean clutch size (4.03) was slightly above average (3.97), and nest initiation was 5 days earlier than normal. Nest density (34.1 nests/km) was also above average (32.0) this year.

- The framework for the 2005-06 season remains at 45 days/2 geese this year for the Chesapeake Region (MD, DE, and VA). The Mid-Atlantic Region (NY, PA, NJ) harvests a smaller proportion of migrant geese, and the framework in this Region allows a 3-bird bag this year.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Resident Canada Geese, August 2006

- The resident Canada goose population increased significantly during the 1980's and early 1990's. The population peaked in the mid-late 1990's in Virginia and has been steadily reduced by specific management programs since that time. The current population estimate is 145,322 (+/- 26%) in Virginia and over 1 million in the Atlantic Flyway.

- Special resident goose-hunting seasons were initiated in 1993 in Virginia to help manage the resident goose population and to provide opportunities for waterfowl hunters. These seasons are designed to occur prior to the arrival of migrant geese, or in areas where there are fewer migrant geese. The first migrant geese begin to arrive in Virginia around September 25 each year, so the Federal Framework allows Virginia to conduct its resident season from September 1-25.

- There are fewer migrant geese located in the western part of the state. A special late hunting season (22 days) west of I-95 was initiated in 1996-97. The late season has been expanded since then and now is nearly 70 days long, running from November to mid-February.

- Special resident goose seasons have been very popular. These seasons are also the most effective tool in managing resident goose populations in areas where hunting is allowed. In areas where hunting is not feasible other options are necessary to mitigate conflicts.

- Liberal hunting seasons have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests, and have been effective in reducing the population. Harvest objectives are to maintain the statewide population at or below current levels.

Year	Resident Goose Pop. Est.3-Year running Avg.	September Harvest	Late Season Harvest
1993	115,835	2,316	--
1994	129,409	3,464	--
1995	151,043	5,500	--
1996	181,813	10,000	12,000
1997	249,612	10,500	15,400
1998	264,867	12,200	19,000
1999	261,554	12,800	21,900
2000	227,164	13,400	44,100
2001	218,384	11,800	31,800
2002	218,719	14,300	26,800
2003	192,780	14,800	17,000
2004	152,015	17,000	14,100
2005	141,377	10,100	9,200
2006	145,322	--	--

FACT SHEET - The Status of Back Bay Canada Geese, August 2006

- Back Bay historically wintered large numbers of Canada geese, averaging between 3,000-5,000 geese annually from the 1950's to the early 1970's, and in some years reaching as many as 15,000. Goose numbers started declining in the late 1970's, and by the mid 1980's, were averaging below 1,000 annually. Conservative harvest regulations were instituted in the 1980's and the season was closed in 1989.

- The decline was not limited to Back Bay, but was seen throughout the Southeast, from Florida to North Carolina. The decline has been attributed to major changes in the landscape and a shift in the migratory patterns of Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway.

- Although migrant Canada goose numbers have recovered in the Chesapeake and Mid-Atlantic areas in the past 10 years, they have not recovered in Back Bay or other southern winter areas.

- During the same time frame, resident geese have greatly expanded throughout the Southeast. In Back Bay and the cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake, landscape and habitat conditions have changed dramatically, bolstering a stead increase in resident Canada goose numbers.

- In 2005-06, the Canada goose season was re-opened on Back Bay, on a limited basis (15 days with a 1 goose daily limit), to provide some goose hunting opportunities for Back Bay waterfowlers. The season is considered experimental and is being used to help evaluate the proportion of resident verses migrant Canada geese in the Back Bay area.

- As part of a Memorandum of Agreement with the USFWS, VDGIF is required to monitor winter Canada goose numbers, evaluate band recoveries, monitor hunter participation/success, conduct hunter bag check, and collect feather samples of Canada geese harvested during the season. The season must be held in late January to minimize concerns about geese that might migrate through Virginia to areas further south.

- As anticipated, the harvest in 2005-06 was relatively small. Evaluations will continue for the next two seasons, after which a decision to continue, liberalize, or to suspend the special season will be made.

FACT SHEET - Status of Snow Geese, Atlantic Brant and Swan, 2006

- **The Greater Snow Goose** population is monitored on spring staging areas near the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec. The 2006 estimate was 1,016,900 geese (+/- 8%), which is 25% higher than last year's estimate. This population has increased about 2% per year since 1997. Mid-Winter Survey (MWS) counts in the Atlantic Flyway have also increased about 2% per year during 1997-2006.

- The principle nesting areas for greater snow geese are on Bylot, Axel Heiberg, Ellesmere, and Baffin Islands, and on Greenland. These geese winter along the Atlantic coast from New Jersey to North Carolina.

- Cool June weather in some areas delayed snowmelt and resulted in lower nesting densities this year. Clutch size (4.0) was above average (3.7), but the nest predation rate was moderately high. A fall flight similar to that of 2005, but lower than the long-term average is expected.

- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from November to March, with a bag limit of 15 geese. This has led to a higher overall harvest. However, the population is continuing to grow and there are still concerns about the detrimental impacts these birds are having on breeding and wintering habitats.

- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared that will address alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset) to increase the harvest of Greater snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway.

- **Brant.** Atlantic brant nests on islands of the eastern Arctic and winter along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to North Carolina. The 2006 MWS estimate of brant in the Atlantic Flyway was 146,600, 19% higher than the 2005 estimate. Climate records from Baffin, Southampton, and Ellesmere Islands indicate that the spring of 2006 was warmer than average and snowmelt was earlier than in recent years. Nesting phenology appeared to be earlier than the past two years and production may be above average this year. However, the concern over the lack of food abundance on the wintering areas and heavier than anticipated harvest in 2005 has prompted the Atlantic Flyway to recommend a similar season as last year.

- **Tundra Swans**. The Eastern Population of tundra swans nest from the Seward Peninsula of Alaska to the northeast shore of Hudson Bay and Baffin Island. These birds winter in coastal areas from Maryland to North Carolina. Production of eastern population tundra swans in 2006 is expected to be above average.

- During the 2006 MWS, 70,500 eastern population tundra swans were observed, 3% more than last year. However, MWS estimates had decreased an average of 3% per year from 1997-2005.

- The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, and frameworks have remained the same as last year.